



RE'EH

## The Real Meaning of *Tzedakah*

*Why Giving Shouldn't Feel Like Earning*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Re'eh*

"See," says Moses to the people of Israel, "I place before you today a blessing and a curse"—the blessing that will come when they fulfill G-d's commandments and the curse if they abandon them. These should be proclaimed on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal when the people cross over into the Holy Land.

A Temple should be established in "the place that G-d will choose to make His name," where the people should bring their sacrifices to Him: It is forbidden to make offerings to G-d in any other place. It is permitted to slaughter animals elsewhere, not as sacrifices but

to eat their meat; the blood (which, in the Temple, is poured upon the altar), however, may not be eaten.

A false prophet or one who entices others to worship idols should be put to death; an idolatrous city must be destroyed. The identifying signs for kosher animals and fish and the list of nonkosher birds (first given in Leviticus 11) are repeated.

A tenth of all produce is to be eaten in Jerusalem or else exchanged for money, with which food is purchased and eaten there. In certain years, this tithe is given to the poor instead. Firstborn cattle and

sheep are to be offered in the Temple and their meat eaten by the *Kohanim* (priests).

The *mitzvah* of charity obligates a Jew to aid a fellow in need with a gift or loan. On the sabbatical year (occurring every seventh year) all loans are to be forgiven. All indentured servants are to be set free after six years of service.

Our *parshah* concludes with the laws of the three pilgrimage festivals—Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot—when all should go to "see and be seen" before G-d in the Holy Temple.

## QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

If I've been putting in the effort—praying, doing *mitzvot*, living a good life—why does it sometimes feel like I'm not getting what I deserve? How do I make sense of that?

# TEXT 1

Deuteronomy  
15:4-11

ד. אָפֶס כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה בָּךְ אֶבְיוֹן, כִּי בָרַךְ  
יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' בָּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן  
לָךְ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ.

ה. רַק אִם שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל ה'  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ, לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל הַמִּצְוָה  
הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם.

ו. כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּרַכְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָךְ,  
וְהֶעֱבַטְתָּ גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְאַתָּה לֹא תַעֲבֹט  
וּמִשְׁלֹתָ בְּגוֹיִם רַבִּים וּבָךְ לֹא יִמְשְׁלוּ.

ז. כִּי יִהְיֶה בָּךְ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאַחַד אַחֶיךָ  
בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
נָתַן לָךְ, לֹא תִאֲמָץ אֶת לִבְּךָ וְלֹא  
תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאַחֶיךָ הָאֶבְיוֹן.

4. However, there will be no needy among you, for G-d will surely bless you in the Land that G-d is giving you for an inheritance to possess.

5. However, if you hearken to the voice of G-d to be careful to do all this commandment that I am commanding you today.

6. For G-d has blessed you, as He spoke to you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.

7. If there will be among you a needy person, from one of your brothers in one of your cities, in your Land G-d is giving you, do not harden your heart or close your hand against your needy brother.

# TEXT 1

Deuteronomy  
15:4-11

ט. הַשְׁמֹר לָךְ פֶּן יִהְיֶה דְבָר עִם לִבְבְּךָ  
בְּלִיַּעַל לֵאמֹר, קָרְבָה שָׁנַת הַשְּׂבַע שָׁנַת  
הַשְּׁמִטָה, וְרָעָה עֵינֶיךָ בְּאַחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן  
וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ, וְקָרָא עָלֶיךָ אֵל ה' וְהָיָה  
בָּךְ חֵטָא.

י. נָתַתָּן תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא יִרַע לִבְבְּךָ בְּתַתָּךְ  
לוֹ, כִּי בִגְלַל הַדֶּבֶר הַזֶּה יִבְרַכְךָ ה'  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּבְכָל מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ.

יא. כִּי לֹא יִחְדַּל אֲבִיּוֹן מִקְרֵב הָאָרֶץ,  
עַל כֵּן אֲנֹכִי מְצִוֶּה לֵאמֹר פָּתַח תִּפְתָּח  
אֶת יָדְךָ לְאַחִיךָ לַעֲנִיָּה וּלְאֲבִיּוֹן  
בְּאַרְצְךָ.

ח. כִּי פָתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ, וְהִעֲבִיט  
תַּעֲבִיטָנוּ דִּי מִחֲסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסֹר לוֹ.

8. Rather, you shall certainly open your hand to him,  
and you shall lend him sufficiently for his needs,  
which he is lacking.

9. Beware, lest there be in your heart an unfaithful  
thought, saying, "The seventh year, the year of  
release has approached," and you will begrudge  
your needy brother and not give him, and he will cry  
out to G-d against you, and it will be a sin to you.

10. You shall surely give him, and your heart shall  
not be grieved when you give to him, for because of  
this thing G-d will bless you in all your work and in  
all your endeavors.

11. For there will never cease to be needy within the  
Land. Therefore, I command you, saying, "You shall  
surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor  
one, and to your needy one in your Land."



*Tzedakah* is a core  
Jewish value and  
holds a special place  
in the Jewish heart.

## TEXT 2

Maimonides,  
*Mishneh Torah*, Laws  
of Gifts to the Poor  
7:1-2

מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה לִיתֵן צְדָקָה לְעֲנִיִּים כְּפִי מַה שְּׁרָאִוִי לְעֲנִי, אִם הָיְתָה יָד הַנוֹתֵן מִשְׁגָּת,  
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "פֶּתוּחַ תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ לּוֹ", וְנֶאֱמַר "וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחֵי עִמָּךְ",  
וְנֶאֱמַר "וְחֵי אֲחִיךָ עִמָּךְ".

וְכָל הָרוֹאֶה עֲנִי מִבִּקָּשׁ וְהֶעְלִים עֵינָיו מִמֶּנּוּ וְלֹא נָתַן לּוֹ צְדָקָה, עֹבֵר בְּלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה,  
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "לֹא תֹאמֵץ אֶת לִבְבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאֲחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן".

It's a positive commandment to give charity to the poor, according to what's appropriate for the poor person if this is within the financial capacity of the donor, as the verses state, "You shall certainly open your hand to him," and "You shall support him, a stranger and a resident, and they shall live with you" (Leviticus 25:35), and "And your brother shall live with you" (Leviticus 25:36).

Anyone who sees a poor person asking and turns their eyes away and does not give charity transgresses a negative commandment, as the verse states: "Do not harden your heart or close your hand against your needy brother."



- Giving *tzedakah* is an active *mitzvah*
- Withholding *tzedakah* violates a clear prohibition



*Tzedakah* is always important and encouraged, but certain times like the High Holidays are especially meaningful for giving.



# TEXT 3

Maimonides,  
*Mishneh Torah*, Laws  
of *Teshuvah* 3:3-4

וְכַשֵּׁם שֶׁשׁוֹקָלִין זְכוֹת אָדָם וְעֲוֹנוֹתָיו  
בְּשַׁעַת מִיתָתוֹ, כֹּךָ בְּכָל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה  
שׁוֹקָלִין עֲוֹנוֹת כָּל אָחָד וְאָחָד מִבְּאֵי  
הָעוֹלָם עִם זְכוֹתָיו בְּיוֹם טוֹב שֶׁל רֹאשׁ  
הַשָּׁנָה . . . וְהַבִּינוּנִי תוֹלִין אוֹתוֹ עַד יוֹם  
הַכִּפּוּרִים . . .

וּמִפְּנֵי עֲנָן זֶה, נִהְגוּ כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל  
לְהִרְבּוֹת בְּצִדְקָה וּבְמַעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים,  
וְלַעֲסוֹק בְּמַצּוֹת מֵרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד יוֹם  
הַכִּפּוּרִים יֵתֵר מִכָּל הַשָּׁנָה.

וְנִהְגוּ כוֹלָם לָקוּם בַּלַּיְלָה בַּעֲשֶׂרָה יָמִים  
אֵלּוֹ וּלְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּבִתִּי כְּנִסְיוֹת בְּדַבְּרֵי  
תַּחֲנוּנִים וּבְכִיבוֹשִׁין עַד שִׁיאֹר הַיּוֹם.

Just as a person's merits and sins are weighed at the time of his or her death, so, too, the sins of every inhabitant of the world together with their merits are weighed on the festival of Rosh Hashanah. . . . The average person's verdict remains tentative until Yom Kippur. . . .

For these reasons, it is customary for all Jews to give profusely to charity, perform many good deeds, and be occupied with *mitzvot* from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur to a greater extent than during the remainder of the year.

During these ten days, the custom is for everyone to rise while it is still night and pray in the synagogues with heartrending words of supplication until daybreak.

## QUESTION

If *tzedakah* is just as important all year, why is it emphasized during the High Holidays and why specifically *tzedakah* rather than any other *mitzvah*?



Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the weekday Amidah skips the word *tzedakah* in the blessing about restoring judgment.

# TEXT 4

Rabbi Shneur Zalman  
of Liadi, *Shulchan  
Aruch HaRav, Orach  
Chayim* 582:1-2

כָּל הַשָּׁנָה אָדָם מְתַפַּלֵּל "הָא-ל הַקְדוֹשׁ" בְּבִרְכָּה ג', וְ"מֶלֶךְ אוֹהֵב צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט" בְּבִרְכָּה י"א, חוּץ מִעֲשָׂרָה יָמִים שָׁבִין רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְיוֹם הַכִּיּוּרִים, שֶׁבֶּהֱן צָרִיךְ לֹאמַר "הַמֶּלֶךְ הַקְדוֹשׁ" "הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמִּשְׁפָּט".

לְפִי שְׁבִימִים הִלְלוּ, הַקְדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא מְרַאֶה מַלְכוּתוֹ לְשָׁפוֹט אֶת הָעוֹלָם . . . דִּישׁ הַפָּרָשׁ בֵּין "מֶלֶךְ אוֹהֵב צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט" לְ"הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמִּשְׁפָּט": דְּבִכָּל הַשָּׁנָה, הַצְדָּקָה עִיקָר, וּלְכֹךְ הַקְדִּימוּהָ לַמִּשְׁפָּט. אֲבָל בְּיָמִים הֵלֵלוּ, הַמִּשְׁפָּט עִיקָר.

All year long, a person says "the holy G-d" in the third blessing of the Amidah and "the King who loves *tzedakah* and justice" in the eleventh blessing—except during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when one must say "the holy King" and "the King of judgment."

During these days, G-d reveals His kingship to judge the world. There is a difference between "the King who loves *tzedakah* and justice" and "the King of judgment." Throughout the year, *tzedakah* is primary, and therefore it's mentioned before justice. But during these days, judgment is primary.

## High Holidays



King of judgment

Sticking to the law

## Year-Round



King who loves justice

Room for extrajudicial care

Why then do we increase *tzedakah* during this time?

# TEXT 5

Job 35:6-7

ו. אִם חָטֵאתָ מֶה תַּפְעֵל בּוֹ וְרַבּוֹ פִּשְׁעֶיךָ מֶה  
תַּעֲשֶׂה לוֹ.

ז. אִם צַדִּיקָתְךָ מֶה תִּתֶּן לוֹ אוֹ מֶה מִיָּדְךָ יִקָּח.

6. If you sinned, what do you do to Him, and if your transgressions are many, what do you do to Him?

7. If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what does He take from your hand?





# TEXT 6

Rabbi Shneur Zalman  
of Liadi, *Tanya*,  
*Likutei Amarim*, ch. 4

אף דִּהְקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא נִקְרָא אֵין סוּף וְלִגְדוּלָתוֹ אֵין חֶקֶר וְלִית מַחְשָׁבָה תְּפִיסָא בֵּיהּ  
כָּלֵל, וְכֵן בְּרִצּוֹנוֹ וְחֻכָּמָתוֹ . . .

הִנֵּה עַל זֶה אָמְרוּ "בְּמָקוֹם שֶׁאַתָּה מוֹצֵא גְדוּלָתוֹ שֶׁל הֶקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שָׁם אַתָּה מוֹצֵא  
עֲנוּתָנוּתוֹ", וְצִמְצָם הֶקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא רִצּוֹנוֹ וְחֻכָּמָתוֹ בְּתַרְי"ג מִצְוֹת הַתּוֹרָה . . . בְּכַדִּי  
שֶׁכָּל הַנִּשְׁמָה אוֹ רוּחַ וְנֶפֶשׁ שֶׁבְּגוּף הָאָדָם תּוּכַל לְהַשְׁיִיגוֹ בְּדַעְתָּהּ וּלְקַיֵּימָן כָּל מָה  
שֶׁאֵפְשָׁר לְקַיֵּים מֵהֵן בְּמַעֲשֵׂה דְבוּר וּמַחְשָׁבָה.

G-d is called "*Ein Sof*"—infinite. His greatness is beyond all measure, and no thought can grasp Him at all—not His essence, not His will, and not His wisdom.

Nevertheless, our sages say: "Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, there you find His humility." G-d compressed His will and His wisdom into the 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah so that every soul within the human body can grasp them with the mind and fulfill them, each according to its capacity, through action, speech, and thought.

**G-d is infinite. We are finite.**



On our own, our deeds cannot affect Him.



G-d chooses to make Himself "touchable."



By valuing what we do, He makes the impossible possible.

# TEXT 7

Rabbi Shneur Zalman  
of Liadi, *Likutei Torah*,  
Shemini Atzeret 83b–c

אך להבין מאין הכח הזה להיות  
אתערוותא דלעילא תלוי  
באתערוותא דלתתא? ואיך יש  
יחוס ושייכות לנברא . . . לעורר  
חסד עליון של הבורא יתברך  
שמו? הלא אין ערוך אליו ולית  
מחשבה תפיסא ביה כלל!

הנה זה ביאר הכתוב אחר כך,  
דכתיב "אשר נשבעת לאבותינו".  
. . . ועל ידי זה ניתן הכח להמשיך  
על ידי מעשה המצוות . . . כלומר  
שהתקשר את עצמו בשבועה . . .  
לייתן כח זה בתחתונים מה שלא  
היה יכולת באדם בלאו הכי.

We need an explanation: Where does this power come from, that an awakening Above . . . depends on an awakening below? How can a created being have any relationship or relevance at all to arouse supernal kindness from the Creator? There is no comparison to Him, and no thought can grasp Him whatsoever!

This is what the verse goes on to explain: "That You swore to our fathers" (Deuteronomy 26:15). . . . We were granted power to draw down Divine influence through doing *mitzvot*. . . . Meaning, G-d bound Himself with an oath . . . committing Himself, as it were, to grant this power to those below, something that a human being could never have accessed on his or her own.



Nothing we do changes G-d, but by His **oath**, He chose to take pleasure in our *mitzvot*, making them meaningful to Him.

# TEXT 8

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, *Hayom  
Yom*, Entry for 8  
Cheshvan

מִצְוָה לְשׁוֹן צְוֹתָא וְחִבּוּר, וְהַעֲוֶשֶׁה  
מִצְוָה מִתְחַבֵּר עִם הָעֲצָמוֹת בְּרוּךְ הוּא,  
שֶׁהוּא הַמִּצְוָה אֶת הַצִּיּוּי הַהוּא.

וְזֶהוּ "שֹׁכֵר מִצְוָה מִצְוָה", דְּזֶה מָה  
שֶׁנִּתְחַבֵּר עִם עֲצָמוֹת אֹר אֵין סוּף  
מִצְוָה הַצִּיּוּי, זֶהוּ שֹׁכֵרוֹ.

וְיֻבֵּן בְּמַשָּׁל גִּשְׁמִי: אִישׁ פָּשוּט בְּיוֹתֵר  
יֵישׁ לוֹ בְּטוֹל פְּנִימִי אֶל הַחֲכָמָה וּמַעֲלֵת  
חָכָם, בְּבִטּוֹל דִּהְעֵדָר תְּפִיסַת מָקוֹם  
לְגַמְרִי. וְכֵן גַּם בְּהַרְגֵּשׁ הַחֲכָם, הָרִי  
אִישׁ הַפָּשוּט אֵינוֹ נִכְנָס אֶצְלוֹ בְּגֵדָר  
אֲנוּשִׁי כָּלֵל - וְאֵין זֶה דִּמְבַטְלוֹ וְדוֹחָה  
אוֹתוֹ, חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם, דְּזֶהוּ מִדָּה רַעָה -  
וְנִחְשָׁב בְּעֵינָיו שֶׁאֵין לוֹ קוֹשֶׁר נָשׁל יַחַס  
עִמּוֹ כָּלֵל.

The word *mitzvah* comes from *tzavta*—connection, bonding. When a person performs a *mitzvah*, he or she becomes connected with G-d, the One who commanded that command.

This is the meaning of “the reward of a *mitzvah* is the *mitzvah* itself” (Avot 4:2). The very fact that one becomes connected with the essence of G-d Himself, the One Who commanded the *mitzvah*—that itself is the reward.

This can be understood with a physical analogy. Imagine the simplest of people, who pales in comparison before the wisdom and stature of a great sage, a nullification so complete that he has no sense of self-importance at all. From the perspective of the sage, too, this simple person does not even register as a peer in the category of “equals.” Not because the sage rejects or degrades him—G-d forbid, that would be a negative trait—but because there is simply no point of comparison or relationship.

# TEXT 8

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, *Hayom  
Yom*, Entry for 8  
Cheshvan

וְהָיָה כִּאֲשֶׁר הֶחֱכַם יִצְוֶה לְאִישׁ הַפְּשׁוּט  
לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵיזָה דָּבָר בְּשִׁבְלֵוֹ, הִנֵּה בְּצִיּוּי  
זֶה נּוֹלֵד מְצִיאוֹתוֹ שֶׁל הָאִישׁ הַפְּשׁוּט, הֵן  
לְעֶצְמוֹ שְׁמֵרָגִישׁ מְצִיאוֹתוֹ אֲשֶׁר הוּא  
יָכוֹל לְקַיֵּים מִצְוֹת הֶחֱכָם וְלוֹ צִיּוּה  
לַעֲשׂוֹת דָּבָר, וְהֵן בְּעֵינֵי הֶחֱכָם נִחָשֵׁב  
לְמְצִיאוֹת אֲשֶׁר אֵלָיו יִדְבֵּר וִיצְוֶה,  
וּלְבַד זֹאת הָרִי צִיּוּי זֶה מְאַחֵד הֶחֱכָם  
הָרָם וְנִעְלָה עִם הָאִישׁ הַפְּשׁוּט בְּיוֹתֵר.  
וְהַנִּמְשָׁל מוֹבֵן.

וּמוֹבֵן גַּם כֵּן אֲשֶׁר בִּיחֹס לְהַנְזָכֵר לְעִיל,  
אֵין הַבְּדֵל כָּלֵל בְּמָה יִהְיֶה הַצִּיּוּי, אִם  
דָּבָר גָּדוֹל וְנִעְלָה אוֹ קָטָן וּפְשׁוּט.

But when the sage instructs this simple person to do something for him, something new is created. Through the command, the simple person gains existence—both in his own eyes, as someone capable of fulfilling the sage’s will, and in the eyes of the sage, as someone to whom he speaks and gives instruction. That very command unites the lofty, exalted sage with the simplest of people. The analogy speaks for itself.

And in light of this, it’s clear that there is no difference at all in what the command is, whether something great and elevated or small and simple.



G-d choosing to value our *mitzvot* is His kindness, “**His *tzedakah***,” to us. It’s a gift we didn’t earn, and realizing this fills us with gratitude.

# TEXT 9

Midrash, *Vayikra*  
*Rabah* 27:2

וְרוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ אוֹמֶרֶת: מִי  
הִקְדִּימָנִי וְאַשְׁלֵם, מִי קָלָם  
לְפָנַי עַד שֶׁלֹּא נָתַתִּי לוֹ  
נֶשְׁמָה, מִי מָלַל לְשָׁמַי עַד  
שֶׁלֹּא נָתַתִּי לוֹ בֶּן זָכָר, מִי  
עָשָׂה לִי מַעֲקָה עַד שֶׁלֹּא נָתַתִּי  
לוֹ גֵּג, מִי עָשָׂה לִי מְזוּזָה עַד  
שֶׁלֹּא נָתַתִּי לוֹ בַּיִת, מִי עָשָׂה  
לִי סִכָּה עַד שֶׁלֹּא נָתַתִּי לוֹ  
מָקוֹם, מִי עָשָׂה לִי לוּלָב עַד  
שֶׁלֹּא נָתַתִּי לוֹ דָּמִים, מִי עָשָׂה  
לִי צִיצִית עַד שֶׁלֹּא נָתַתִּי לוֹ  
טְלִית,

The Divine Spirit declares: Who has ever given to Me first, that I should repay?

Who praised Me before I gave them a soul?

Who spoke in My name before I gave them a child?

Who made a parapet for Me before I gave them a roof?

Who affixed a *mezuzah* for Me before I gave them a house?

Who made a sukkah for Me before I gave them a place?

Who took a *lulav* for Me before I gave them the means?

Who put on *tzitzit* for Me before I gave them a garment?



# TEXT 9

Midrash, *Vayikra*  
*Rabah* 27:2

מִי הַפְּרִישׁ לְפָנַי פֶּאֶה עַד  
שָׁלֹא נָתַתִּי לוֹ שְׂדֵה, מִי  
הַפְּרִישׁ לִי תְרוּמָה עַד שָׁלֹא  
נָתַתִּי לוֹ גֶּרֶן, מִי הַפְּרִישׁ לְפָנַי  
חֶלֶה עַד שָׁלֹא נָתַתִּי לוֹ עֶסֶה,  
מִי הַפְּרִישׁ לְפָנַי קֶרֶבֶן עַד  
שָׁלֹא נָתַתִּי לוֹ בְּהֵמָה.

Who set aside *pe'ah* for Me before I gave them a field?

Who separated *terumah* for Me before I gave them a threshing floor?

Who separated *chalah* for Me before I gave them dough?

Who brought an offering before Me before I gave them an animal?

Everything comes first from Me.

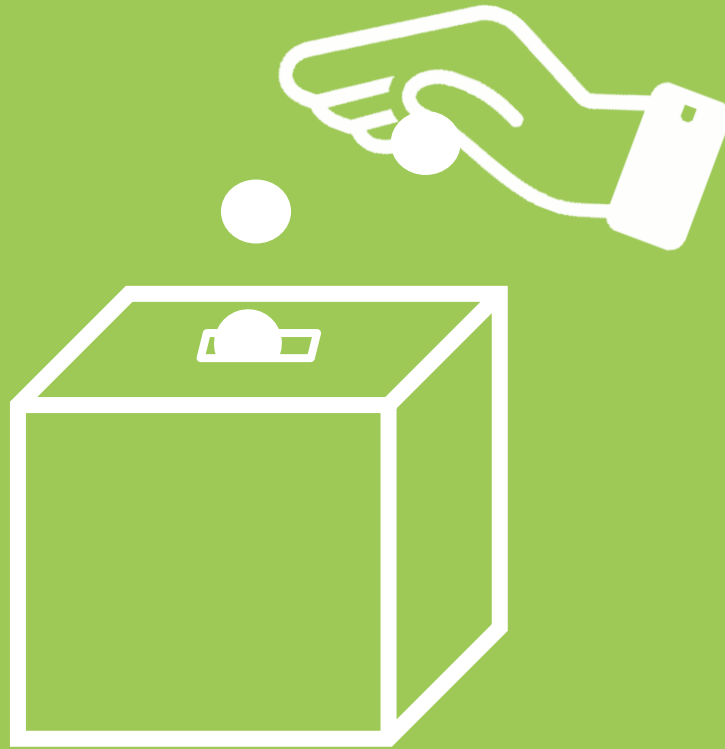
For every *mitzvah*, G-d first gives us life, strength, and material needs as His gift. What we do is possible only because of Him, so we can never feel entitled.





Before Rosh Hashanah, we remember that whatever good we receive isn't earned but given as kindness. *Tzedakah* helps us enter the days of judgment with humility.

*Tzedakah* reminds us that our *mitzvot* matter only because G-d gives them value, so we give to others and ask Him to judge us with that same kindness.



# TEXT 10

Midrash, *Vayikra*  
*Rabah* 27:2

בְּרִיבוֹי הַצְדָּקָה מוֹדָגֵשׁ . . . שֶׁהָאָדָם  
מְרַגִּישׁ שֶׁצָּרִיךְ לְזָכוֹת בְּדִין רַק מִחֲמַת  
צְדָקָתוֹ שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁלֹּכֵן  
מְרַבֶּה בַּצְדָּקָה כְּדִי שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא  
יִתְנֶהג עִמּוֹ גַּם כֵּן בְּאוֹכֵן שֶׁל צְדָקָה  
מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה.

כְּלוּמַר, זֶה שֶׁהָאָדָם מְרַגִּישׁ שֶׁכָּל מָה  
שֶׁזּוֹכֶה מְלַמְעָלָה הוּא בְּגֶדֶר צְדָקָה  
וּמִתְנַת תָּנִים, צָרִיךְ לְהִתְבַּטֵּא לֹא רַק  
בְּתַפְלָתוֹ, אֲלָא גַם בְּמַעֲשָׂיו שֶׁכּוֹנְנֵתָם  
הַטִּיית כַּף הַמֵּאזְנִיִּים שֶׁל הַדִּין לְטוֹבָה  
עַל פִּי הַדִּין, גַּם בָּהֶם צָרִיךְ לְהִדְגִּישׁ  
שֶׁזֶהוּ לִפְנֵים מִשׁוֹרֵת הַדִּין כָּלפִּי מַעֲלָה.

By increasing *tzedakah*, we emphasize . . .  
that we know we can only gain favorable  
judgment credit to G-d's righteousness.  
That's why we give generously, so that  
G-d will deal with us in the same way,  
with *tzedakah*, measure for measure.

In other words, if we truly feel that  
everything we receive from Above is an  
unearned gift, that awareness can't stay  
confined to prayers. It has to show up in  
our actions. Even when we do things  
meant to tip the scale of judgment in our  
favor, we must do them with the clear  
recognition that, from Heaven's side, any  
positive outcome is beyond the letter of  
the law.

## TEXT 11

Rabbi Eliyahu Spira,  
*Eliyahu Rabah, Orach  
Chayim* 581:1

אִישׁ לְיָרֵעָהּ וּמִתְּנוּת לְאַבְיוֹנִים רְמֵז  
מִתְּנוּת עֲנִיִּים בְּאֵלוּל.

The Hebrew words in the *Megillah* for “a person to their friend and gifts to the poor” (Esther 9:22) form an acrostic spelling “Elul.”

## ANSWER

Each opportunity to do a *mitzvah* is G-d's gift to us. *Tzedakah* is the lens through which all of our *mitzvot* during this time of year hold weight.

a person—אִישׁ  
*Ish*

to their friend—לִירֵעֵהוּ  
*Lere'ehu*

and gifts—וּמַתָּנוֹת  
*Umatanot*

to the poor—לְאֶבְיוֹנִים  
*La'evyonim*

Elul prepares us for the New Year. We increase our giving as part of that preparation, as hinted in the name “Elul.”



# TEXT 12

Rabbi Yaakov ben  
Asher, *Arbaah Turim*,  
*Orach Chayim* 581

וַיֵּשׁ מִי שְׁמַרְבִּין לֹמֵר סְלִיחוֹת וְתַחֲנוּגִים מֵרֹאשׁ חוֹדֶשׁ אֱלוּל וְאֵילָף . . . וְכָל  
הַמוֹסִיף לְבַקֵּשׁ רַחֲמִים זְכוּת הוּא לוֹ . . .

וּמִנְהַג אֲשֶׁכְּנֹז כְּשֶׁחֵל רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה בְּיוֹם ה' אוֹ בְּשַׁבָּת, אָז מִתְחִיל בְּיוֹם רֹאשׁוֹן  
שְׁלִפְנִי, לַעֲמֹד בְּאַשְׁמוּרַת הַבֶּקֶר וְאוֹמְרִים סְלִיחוֹת וְתַחֲנוּגִים . . . וְכִשְׁחֵל  
רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה בְּב' אוֹ ג', אָז מִתְחִילִין בְּיוֹם רֹאשׁוֹן בַּשָּׁבוּעַ שְׁלִפְנֵי הַשָּׁבוּעַ  
שֶׁחֵל רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה לְהִיּוֹת בְּתוֹכָהּ.

Some have the custom to add Selichot and supplications from the first day of Elul onward. . . . Whoever increases requests for mercy gains merit.

The Ashkenazic custom is as follows: When Rosh Hashanah falls on Thursday or Shabbat, we begin on the Sunday before, rising early in the morning to recite Selichot. When Rosh Hashanah falls on Monday or Tuesday, we begin on the Sunday of the week preceding the week in which Rosh Hashanah occurs.

Selichot teach us that  
real merit comes from  
when we realize even our  
good deeds are G-d's gift;  
that mindset is what  
gives them real value.



# TEXT 13

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, *Likutei  
Sichot* 34, pp. 93–94

לְשׁוֹן הַטּוֹר "וְכָל הַמוֹסִיף לְבַקֵּשׁ רַחֲמִים  
זְכוּת הוּא לוֹ". דְּלִכְאוּרָה הָרִי זֶה תַּרְתִּי  
דְּסִתְרִי: דְּבַקְנִשׁת רַחֲמִים תּוֹכְנָה נְשָׂאָה  
נְשָׂאִין לוֹ זְכוּת מִבְּקֵשׁ נְשִׁקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ  
הוּא יְרַחֵם עָלָיו, נִשְׁהוּא הַהִיפֹךְ דְּ"זְכוּת  
הוּא לוֹ"?

אֵלֶּא נִשְׁהַדְרֹךְ לְזִכּוּת בְּיָמִים אֵלּוּ הִיא עַל  
יְדֵי נְשִׁנָּה אֲצִלּוֹ נִשְׁתַּמֵּיד זְקוּק לְבַקֵּשׁ  
רַחֲמִים מֵאַת הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא נְשִׁיתֵן לוֹ  
צְדָקָה וּמִתְּנַת חֲנָם . . .

וְעַל יְדֵי הַנִּהְגָּה זֹ, זֹכָה כָּל אֶחָד לְהַפְתֵּב  
וּלְהַחֲתֵם בְּסִפְרֵן נֶשׁל צְדִיקִים גְּמוּרִים,  
וְעַד נִשְׁלַפְנִי רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יוֹדְעִים נֶשׁהֵם  
זֹכִים בְּדִין — לְכַתִּיבָה וְחִתִּימָה טוֹבָה  
לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמִתּוּקָה בְּטוֹב הַנִּרְאָה  
וְהַנִּגְלָה.

The *Tur*'s wording is striking: "Whoever increases in asking for mercy gains merit." At first glance, that sounds self-contradictory. Asking for mercy means admitting you have no merits, pleading that G-d have compassion despite that. How does that square with "gaining merit"?

The answer is that this is precisely how one merits during these days. A person feels, deeply and consistently, that he or she always needs to ask G-d for mercy, that whatever they receive must come as *tzedakah*, as an unearned gift. . . .

By living with that awareness, each person merits to be written and sealed in the book of the completely righteous, to the point that even before Rosh Hashanah, we know we'll prevail in judgment, for a good and sweet year, with revealed goodness.



Approaching G-d  
with humility,  
recognizing  
everything as a  
gift, opens the  
door to blessing.

## TEXT 14

Liturgical Rite for  
Selichot Prayers

לְךָ ה' הַצְדָּקָה וְלָנוּ בּוֹשָׁת הַפָּנִים . . . לֹא בְחֶסֶד  
וְלֹא בְּמַעֲשִׂים בָּאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ, כְּדָלִים וְכָרְשִׁים  
דַּפְּקָנוּ דְּלֹתֶיךָ.

To You, G-d, belongs *tzedakah*, and to us, shame. . . .  
Not with claims of kindness, nor with deeds, do we  
come before You. We stand like the poor and the  
destitute, knocking at Your door.

## CALL TO ACTION

The Torah highlights *tzedakah* to teach us how to prepare for Elul and enter the days of judgment with the right mindset.



## KEY POINTS

1. We increase *tzedakah* during the High Holiday period.
2. Our actions carry no inherent value before G-d. That our *mitzvot* are impactful to G-d is a kindness He chose to extend toward us.
3. In fact, the very stuff with which any *mitzvah* is performed is also gifted to us by G-d.
4. As unworthy recipients of G-d's kindness, we increase our *tzedakah* and kindness toward others during the High Holidays to invoke His kindness toward us in like fashion.
5. As mere humans whose actions carry no weight before G-d, our added *tzedakah* is designed to invoke G-d's kindness in lending our actions weight and tipping the scales in our favor.

